



THE LARK BUNTING

QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF THE DENVER FIELD ORNITHOLOGISTS

VOLUME 61 | ISSUE 1 | JANUARY 2025

DFOBIRDS.ORG

“SKY ISLANDS” THREEPEAT

Last call to snag spot on big SE Ariz trip in May

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Club marks milestone in 2025 with new 4-part history

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2024 yet another great year on DFO birding trail

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LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

“Fence birds” in the lens of John Breitsch

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Ferruginous Hawk
Dave Prentice
Pawnee National Grasslands
Weld County





ON THE COVER

Ferruginous Hawk: Jaw-dropping raptor with yellow-gaped grin

Patrick O'Driscoll

After a spring-to-autumn diet of Red-tailed Hawk as the large buteo across most of Colorado, winter's arrival quickens the heartbeat for birders looking for big-hawk variety as cold weather sets in.

They don't get bigger here than the Ferruginous Hawk (*Buteo regalis*), the largest North American buteo in our raptor array. The ones that overwinter along Colorado's Front Range are likely to set up "sit-and-wait" hunting perches wherever there's a prairie dog town. (West of the Divide they also dine on jackrabbits and ground squirrels.) I usually see them in Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and next door in Denver's First Creek @ DEN Open Space. Where's your favorite spot to spot a Ferruge?



A DFO member since 2018, **Dave Prentice** has been a birder / photographer for more than 10 years. A Colorado native, he lives in Denver and is retired from the industrial design field

The lens of DFO member-photographer **Dave Prentice** captured the one on our cover during a "Birds Plus+ Bird Photography" field trip he co-led early last December in the "raptor alley" areas near Pawnee National Grasslands in northeastern Colorado. It's one of the best views I've ever seen of those distinctive feather pantaloons that cover the legs (technically, "feathered tarsi"). See how they glow in the species' namesake rusty orange hue (from the Latin *ferrugineus*, "iron-rust color").

Of course, when trying to ID a Ferruginous Hawk through our binoculars, we all look for that signature slash of yellow, running from beak all the way back to below the eye. They call it the gape, but whenever I see it, I can't help anthropomorphizing in my mind to "yellow lipstick." Whatever you call it, that mouthline is distinctive.

Fun fact: The ones in our prairie dog towns often congregate in small groups that may grow to include eagles and others drawn to the spectacle of Ferruginous Hawks hopping and flapping as they bicker over prey. Another fun fact: They're so large that back when massive bison herds blanketed the Plains, Ferruginous built their prairieland nests with the bones and hair of the shaggy beasts.

Hardly regal behavior, but that word IS part of the species' scientific name (*Buteo regalis*, Latin for "regal, kingly"). It was assigned in the mid-1800s by **George R. Gray**, a British museum "birdkeeper." Nearly a century later, noted American ornithologist **Arthur Cleveland Bent** gushed in his 1930s description of the Ferruginous as a "splendid hawk, the largest, most powerful, and grandest of our buteos, a truly regal bird."

Given their nesting preference for open grassland and sagebrush-steppe country with rocky cliffs, some trees and human handiworks (oil and gas rigs, utility towers and farm structures), it's mildly surprising that more Ferruginous Hawks don't nest in Colorado — 71 total nests by one US Forest Service count. Perhaps that reflects our state's listing of Ferruginous as a "species of greatest conservation need."

The Cornell Lab's *Birds of the World* says Ferruginous Hawk populations have been in decline recently in some of the species' range. The worst drops have been in Canada, where the government has listed the species as threatened since 2010. Declines in the US noted in breeding-bird and migration surveys are blamed on "continued loss and fragmentation" of grass and shrub ecosystems to the usual land management suspects: invasive plants, energy development and agriculture.

Patrick O'Driscoll, editor of *The Lark Bunting* since 2020, took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014, became a field trip leader in 2016, and leads occasional trips in Denver City Park and other local destinations.



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The Lark Bunting, formerly the monthly newsletter of Denver Field Ornithologists, is the club's quarterly journal and is published online in January, April, July and October.

DFO On the Wing, the club's digital newsletter, is emailed monthly to all members.

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Submit time-sensitive, month-to-month news items, tips, announcements, photos and other materials to the monthly newsletter's editor at comm@dfobirds.org.

Editors reserve the right to accept and edit suitable articles and photos for publication.



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**A community of birders,
learning and acting together
for avian wildlife**

Denver Field Ornithologists is an all-volunteer organization that conducts hundreds of free birdwatching field trips throughout the year and welcomes participation and membership by all. DFO promotes enjoyment of nature, the study of birds, and protection of them and their habitats in greater Denver and beyond.

In addition to field trips, evening programs and birding workshops, DFO conducts community science in the field, including the spring Hawk Watch raptor migration count on Dinosaur Ridge.

DFO awards grants annually for bird-related research, education and conservation projects in Colorado. For more information, visit the [Research, Education & Conservation Grants](#) page on the DFO website.

DFO is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and financial contributions to DFO's three giving funds are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law.

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[DFO Leadership Page](#).



FROM THE PRESIDENT

Happy 90th birthday, DFO! And so we begin a year-long celebration of us

Sharon Tinianow

Over the last few months of 2024, several of us among the Denver Field Ornithologists volunteer staff began a fascinating exploration of DFO's history to set the table for our celebration of the club's 90th birthday this new year.

What great fun and surprising insights we had in gathering information for the first article (*in this issue on [page 14](#)*) of a fresh four-part history of DFO since its founding 90 years ago this month as the Colorado Bird Club. With *Lark Bunting* quarterly journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** and club historian and retired archivist **Kris Haglund**, I visited the DFO archives at Denver Museum of Nature & Science, which preserves the most complete record of our club's activities. **Laura Uglean Jackson**, the museum's chief archivist, worked with us to determine which items were of greatest interest.

First off, we examined the scrapbook of **Ruth Wheeler**, vice president of the bird club in 1936 and 1937. Fifty years later, as the club's last surviving charter member, Ruth received in 1988 the very first [DFO Ptarmigan Award](#), our club's highest honor. She richly deserved it. The records she kept were admirably extensive. Ruth collected items



From the scrapbook of charter bird club member Ruth Wheeler
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Continued on page 6

FROM THE PRESIDENT *cont from page 5*

from the bird club's earliest days and clipped articles about birds, birding and the club. Ruth was also an avid photographer, and many of her invaluable snapshots of early club field trips are in that scrapbook.

The museum archives also contain the club's board meeting minutes and club correspondence from the start in 1935 to the present — except for one large but recent gap. Missing are the minutes from **1986 through 2012**. If anyone reading this has copies of those, please get in touch! We would love to complete the collection this anniversary year.

Pat and I also visited the Denver Public Library Central branch to see an eclectic boxful of clippings and other historical items contributed by the late **Catherine “Birdie” Hurlbutt**, another charter member of the club. If you've never heard of this colorful and committed Denver woman, you will in the second part of our new DFO history, due out in the next issue of *The Lark Bunting* in April. Not to be missed! The Denver Public Library's microfilm cache of most of the daily issues of *The Denver Post* and *Rocky Mountain News* also enabled us to retrieve articles about the Colorado Bird Club in the 29 years before it became DFO in 1964.

I should note that it was **Peter Burke**, editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists' quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*, who reminded us that our club was founded on the heels of the landmark publication in 1934 of **Roger Tory Peterson's** trend-setting *A Field Guide to the Birds*. Peterson's slender volume was a gateway for bird enthusiasts like the predecessors who formed our club. Unique among nature guides of that era, it was small enough to fit in a pocket, and it weighed barely 1 pound, easy to carry into the field. Peterson also developed a visual language — combining simplified paintings of birds with clear, concise descriptions — to help amateur birders identify and study birds outdoors where they lived. Arrows directed attention to distinguishing field marks in the illustrations, an innovation that Peterson even trademarked so no other field guide could use it.

Prior to 1930, species were typically identified with the bird in hand — after shooting it. In the preface to his own 1903 volume, *Color Key to North American Birds*, pioneering field guide author **Frank M. Chapman** wrote: “From the scientific point of view there is but one satisfactory way to identify a bird. A specimen of it should be in hand in order that its form, color, and size may be accurately determined, when, with the aid of analytical keys, with which most text books are provided, it is a simple matter to ascertain the bird's name.” Chapman's 2-pound tome fit nicely on the bookshelf but not in the pocket.

Peterson, a student of painting in New York City in 1930, resolved to make a bird ID book that anyone could use in the field without having to capture or kill birds. The 2,000-copy first printing of *A Field Guide to the Birds* sold out in two weeks, even though the book was expensive at \$2 a copy — \$46.80 in today's dollars — just one year into The Great Depression.

What a time that must have been for the still-budding pastime of “bird watching,” a term coined at the start of the 20th century. Our club was formed just as birding became more accessible to the non-scientist.

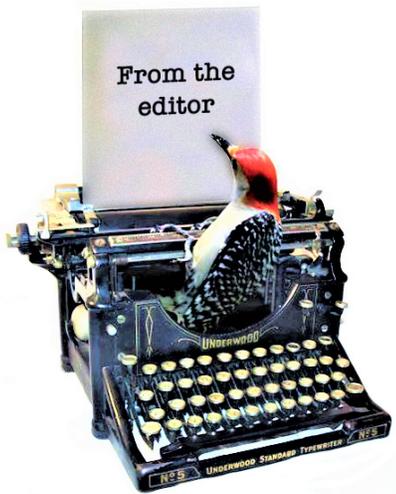
I look forward this new year to more interesting stories and insights as we continue to re-connect threads of our club's history. **We especially hope that if you have a story or memory of DFO to share, you'll contact Pat or me.** We all have a place in the history of Denver Field Ornithologists, and we would love to talk with you about yours.

Good New Year's birding!

*DFO President **Sharon Tinianow**, who joined the club in 2016, was previously vice president and is a former editor of The Lark Bunting. Sharon began birding in an ornithology class in college, and she retired as assistant director of CU Boulder's Museum of Natural History.*



Scrapbook copy of the bird club's early logo, depicting a Lark Bunting
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science



Welcome to the “new” *Lark Bunting*

Patrick O’Driscoll

You’re probably wondering: What’s “new” here? This is still *The Lark Bunting* monthly newsletter that Denver Field Ornithologists has been publishing for decades, right?

It looks the same, but two words on the cover mark the difference: *Quarterly Journal*.

From now on, *The Lark Bunting* will appear every three months instead of monthly.

Although it looks like the previous newsletter, most of the journal’s content will be less time-sensitive and more feature-oriented: birding articles, essays, field trip memories, photo galleries, and other non-urgent features not tied to this month or that.

This month, DFO also launches an email newsletter we’re calling *DFO On The Wing* for the need-to-know-now stuff. It will combine monthly digest and club bulletin board to deliver appointment calendar-level info to your inbox when you need it, month after month. That means program meeting details, upcoming events, club business, field trip notes, and anything else with a right-now or coming-soon hook.

The timing is no coincidence. This new year marks DFO’s 90th birthday, perfect timing to refine how we communicate with you, the members. As you will read elsewhere in this first of four DFO anniversary issues of *The Lark Bunting*, the club was founded in 1935 as The Colorado Bird Club. Twenty-nine years later, it changed names to Denver Field Ornithologists (1964) to avoid confusion when Colorado’s new statewide birding organization, Colorado Field Ornithologists, was being formed.

And 2025 is also the 60th birthday of DFO’s newsletter. In October 1965, the club created the ponderously named *Monthly Report of Field Observations of the Denver Field Ornithologists*. Six years later, *The Lark Bunting* was added to the name. Before long, they dropped the other words, and here we are.

Part 1 of *DFO @ 90*, our anniversary history of the club, is the main feature this month, with vintage photos, anecdotes and glimpses of the lives of our Denver birding ancestors. We’ll also begin “The Lives of Birds,” a semi-regular essay series by DFO member **Jared Del Rosso**, a previous contributor to the newsletter. There’s also an engaging photo gallery of “fence bird” pictures by the late **John Breitsch**, our DFO friend and field trip leader who bequeathed his 10,000-image Flickr account to the club before his death last summer. We’ll also continue “Field Trips in Focus,” publishing pictures of DFO birders birding on some of the hundreds of field trips we lead every year.

What else would you like to see here? Let me know. If we wrote profiles of interesting club members, whom would you like to read more about? What about travelogues of cool birding trips or your own favorite DFO outings? Attention, bird photographers: The door is wide open for bird photo galleries. Show us what you’ve got!

Although we’ll appear just four times a year (January, April, July and October), our retooled quarterly still needs your feedback, ideas and involvement. Contact me at patodrisk@gmail.com and let’s enjoy together more words and pictures of the birds we love and the club we celebrate.

Good winter birding!

*Editor of The Lark Bunting since 2020, **Patrick O’Driscoll** took up birding in his 50s. A retired newspaper journalist, he joined DFO in 2014 and became a field trip leader in 2016. In 2023, he received one of DFO’s inaugural Peregrine Awards for innovation.*

DFO News Notes

Patrick O’Driscoll

*Got blurbs on birds? Share with **DFO News Notes**: Colorado birding newsbits, eBird milestones, tales from the trail, birding life (and life birds!), etc. Email your items, photos, links and anything else to patodrisk@gmail.com.*

DFO-LED DEC. 14 CHRISTMAS COUNT LOGS 103 SPECIES

The annual Denver Christmas Bird Count inside a 15-mile circle over Denver’s west-southwest suburbs recorded 103 species in the preliminary tally of its Dec. 14 count day. Three more “count week” birds were also noted. “Everyone felt the birding was ‘slow,’ with low numbers of individuals for many species,” said DFO member **Joey Kellner**, compiler of the annual tally. “However, we did note five species of goose, Long-tailed Duck in two locations, White-winged Scoter, two American Goshawk, three loon species (Common, Pacific & Yellow-billed), four owl species (Eastern Screech, Great Horned, Pygmy and Saw-Whet), five Ruby-crowned Kinglets, a singleton Golden-crowned Kinglet, and a Winter Wren.”

Kellner classified as “big misses” the failure to record a single Wood Duck, Northern Pintail, Northern Harrier, Rough-legged Hawk, American Pipit, or Harris’s, White-throated or Swamp sparrow. “Very few ducks, very few White-crowned and American Tree sparrows, very few Townsend’s Solitaires and American Robins,” he added. “Are they all still north of us and still to come?” Kellner thanked participants and “all my AMAZING area leaders” as well as DFO member **Laura Steadman** “for whipping up a great potluck on short notice” to conclude the day’s after-count compilation meeting at Chatfield State Park.

To check other Colorado Christmas counts, go to Audubon’s (still incomplete) [state-by-state listings](#).

NEXT ON BIRD BOMBS: “RAPTORS FOR REAL” JAN. 23

In Colorado, birds of prey often abound in winter. But it’s a challenge to identify them the way we usually see them — on the wing high overhead or sometimes perched in

hard-to-see spots. Online registration is now open for DFO’s next free bird ID webinar, “BIRD BOMBS: Raptors for Real” — identifying winter raptors the way we see them in the field.

If you missed the most recent episode, “BIRD BOMBS: CBC (Christmas Bird Count) Explosion,” the Zoom video is [now available](#). It’s the 33rd episode in this popular series of Bird ID lessons led by David Suddjian, DFO’s Field Trips chair, frequent trip leader and a birding instructor. (The entire series is on [YouTube](#).) The videos also are available in the video library on the [DFO webpage](#).

REGISTER FOR BIRD BOMBS

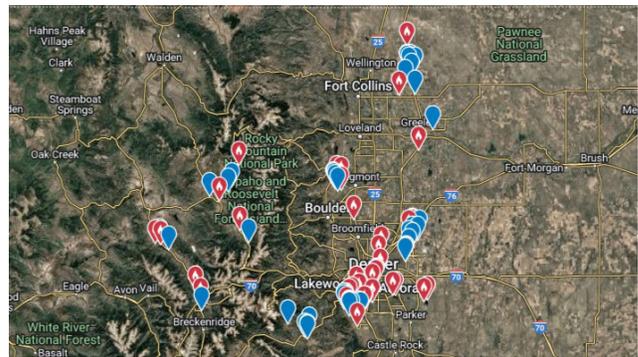


2024’S FINAL MONTHS IN FIELD: 41 DFO OUTINGS

DFO finished 2024 strong in the field, with 41 field trips in the final two months of the year, led by a combined 23 trip leaders. Birders on DFO’s 19 November trips recorded 111 species on 57 checklists. Birders on December’s 22 outings tallied 99 species on 93 checklists. For more about where DFO took birders on all those trips, check out the eBird combined trip reports for each month.

NOVEMBER RESULTS

DECEMBER RESULTS



Continued on page 9

'TIS THE SEASON: HOW TO HELP COMBAT BIRD FLU

[International Bird Rescue](#), the wildlife conservation emergency responders to oil spills and other accidents and events catastrophic for birdlife, has published a six-point guide to taking individual action against a winter outbreak of bird flu. The guidelines start with simple steps that birders especially should follow to prevent spread of HPAI (Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza): disinfecting shoe bottoms with bleach to block disease spread from tracking bird droppings, and cleaning backyard bird feeders weekly to prevent spread by birds that congregate around food.

They encourage prompt reporting to state wildlife agencies of sick or deceased birds, and wariness of “asymptomatic” birds in the field (especially ducks) that appear fine but may actually be infected. Finally, they recommend caution and protection (gloves and changes of clothes) around domestic bird flocks and farms. For more, visit [International Bird Rescue's web page on bird flu](#).

AUDUBON'S BEST 10 BIRD VIDEOS OF 2024

Everyone's familiar with National Audubon's top 100 photos in its annual [Photography Awards contest](#), which is announced in early summer. Less known but no less spectacular in their photography are the national organization's 10 favorite videos of birds from the 2024 awards. The subjects are all exceptional species to begin with: Black Skimmer, Sandhill Crane, Osprey, California Condor, Crested Caracara, American Bittern, Resplendent Quetzal, Waved Albatross, and Burrowing Owl twice . . . two different videos. All but one of the videos are under half a minute (and the longer one's only 31 seconds), so it's an easy diversion that won't suck up hours of your time.

WATCH 10 FAVORITE VIDEOS

Welcome to new DFO members

Cody Brown and Lia Ryan of Denver; Michael Chen and Jean Wei, Englewood; Claire Frazier, Arvada; Alyssa Reed and Janine Reed, Colorado Springs

Thank you for your contribution

Research, Education and Conservation Grants Fund

Mary Beverly, Jill Boice, Susan Clasen, Jean and Charlie Curlee, Jeanne Marie Dillon, David Driscoll, Andrea Duran, Ed Furlong, Mary Geder, Newell Grant, Angela Grun, Kristine Haglund, Stephen Hendrix, David Hill, Edie Israel, Judy Lane, Debra Lentz, Brian and Christine Macdonald, Bob Righter, Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Kris Saucke, David Shafer and Robin Sweeney, Paul Slingsby, Sharon Tinianow, Elaine Wagner, Laura and Wayne Wathen, Tom Whitten, Suzanne and Bill Wuerthele, Scott Yarberry, Deborah Zerkowitz

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Kathy Barnum, Mary Beverly, Jean and Charlie Curlee, Jean Marie Dillon, Laurie Duke, Lee and Linda Farrell, Elizabeth Fischer, Debbie Fox, Sonja and Grace Hahn, Stephen Hendrix, David Hill, Diane Hutton, Mary Keithler, David and Meg Kenny, Roger Koester, Michael Lupini and Janet Peters In memory of Emily Lupini, Felice Lyons In memory of John C Breitsch, Brian and Christine Macdonald, Becky Russell, Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Jason Sell, Evan Sell and Patricia Kuzma Sell, Paul Slingsby, Bob Spencer and Sondra Bland, David and Debra Strike, Alice Tariot and Steven G Schwartz, Mary Ann Tavary, Sharon Tinianow

DFO's Dinosaur Ridge Hawk Watch

Birgit Arvin, Kathy Barnum, Mary Beverly, Chris Blakeslee, Carol Cwiklinski, Laurie Duke, Ed Furlong, Betty Glass, Stephen Hendrix, Ashton and Dana Hiatt, Chuck Hundertmark and Marjorie Jannotta, Diane Hutton, Brian and Christine Macdonald, Richard Maslow, Senja and Mark Meiklejohn, Janet Peters and Michael Lupini, Bob Righter, Janet Shin, Paul Slingsby, Kate and Kyle Sandersen, Laura and Wayne Wathen





DFO members Kris Tita and Jim Estenat DFO's first Coffeehouse Chat Dec. 18 at Wash Perk Patrick O'Driscoll

COFFEEHOUSE CHATS

Pshhhhhhhh! New DFO coffee get-togethers gaining steam

Hear that buzz? Coffeehouse Chats, DFO's new series of meetups to foster casual, in-person get-togethers, is *pshhhhhh-ing* like a barista frothing up a double latté.

On Dec. 18, five of us met at the Wash Perk coffeehouse in Denver's Washington Park neighborhood to socialize over cups of morning Joe. It was a fun start to what we hope will become a regular third-Wednesday monthly practice. We've already got Coffeehouse Chats scheduled for January and March (*see below*).

After COVID shut down face-to-face attendance at program meetings, DFO shifted our monthly evening gatherings to Zoom. The webinar-based platform instantly made remote attendance simpler and more convenient, and it allowed DFO to bring in speakers from afar without the expense of travel from locations as distant as Australia and Costa Rica.

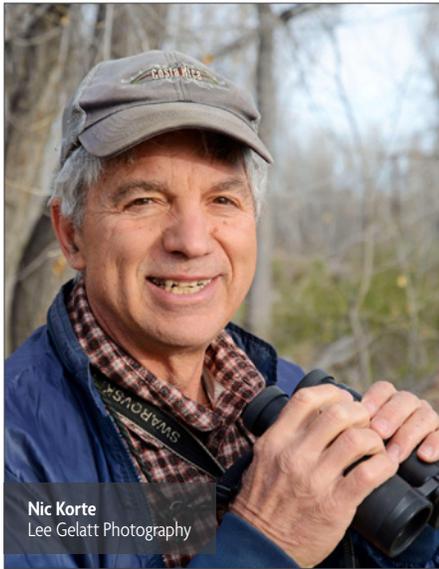
But not a few DFO members have since lamented that our only regular get-togethers since the pandemic are field trips, where socializing takes a backseat to birding. So these casual coffee meetups around the metro area aim to reconnect with old DFO friends and make new ones. Bring something to talk about — a birding topic, a DFO question, or anything else on your mind, bird-related or not — and spark a fun conversation. We aim to locate them near birding hotspots so pre- or post-meetup birding is an option.

Our next Coffeehouse Chat is set for **Wednesday, Jan. 15, 8:30 a.m.** at **St. Mark's Coffee House**, 2019 E 17th Ave., Denver 80206, which is just 3 blocks west of Denver City Park. If you'd like to join us, please RSVP to host **Patrick O'Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com so we'll have a rough headcount. Afterwards, weather permitting, join Pat at City Park for a gander at geese and waterfowl (and other winter birds) on the park's lakes.

Leapfrogging another month ahead, the March get-together is also set: **Wednesday, March 19, 8:30 a.m.** in **Centennial**, at the "coffeehome" of **Kathy Holland**, DFO treasurer. Spots abound nearby for birding before or after Kathy's Coffeehouse Chat, including the Marjorie Perry Nature Preserve, Highline Canal Trail, and Horseshoe Park. RSVP the host at kcloudview@comcast.net for more details. (BTW, Kathy says she is equipped to make espresso, lattés and Americanos, and "I'll have some breakfast treats, too.")

If you can't make our January or March *kaffeeklatsches*, we're lining up sessions for February and into spring. Prospective hosts are exploring coffeehouses from Littleton (Hudson Gardens, Aspen Grove) to west Denver's Highlands neighborhood and beyond. Look for specific dates, times and locations this month and thereafter in DFO's new monthly email newsletter, *DFO On The Wing*.

How about inviting fellow DFO'ers to a coffeehouse near where you live and bird? Please consider hosting a future Coffeehouse Chat. If you're interested, drop an email note to DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** at sharontinianow@gmail.com.



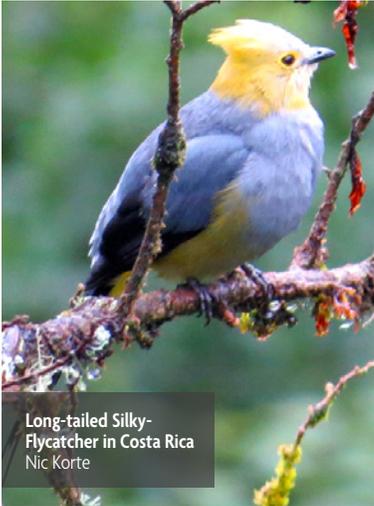
Nic Korte
Lee Gelatt Photography

WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado

Nic Korte
Monday, Jan. 27, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)



Long-tailed Silky-Flycatcher in Costa Rica
Nic Korte

There’s no missing the call to well-informed activism — especially where Mother Earth is concerned — in that familiar turn of phrase, “Think globally, act locally.” Longtime western Colorado wildlife conservationist **Nic Korte** suggests that North American birders try putting a Western Hemispheric twist to it: Think *tropically*, act locally.

Korte says he’ll detail that in “*No Boundaries for Wildlife: Saving Tropical Birds in Colorado*,” his DFO evening program on **Monday, Jan. 27, at 7 p.m. MST** via Zoom webinar. Korte’s presentation was originally scheduled for last August, but had to be postponed and now marks the first DFO program of the new year.

“Local actions here affect birds in the tropics,” Korte says, explaining his tropical focus. “Some of those birds spend part of their lives in Colorado. Avoiding palm oil in products you buy helps not just the birds whose year-round tropical habitat might be saved, but also birds that live part of the year here in North America.”

Korte, a 40-year resident of Grand Junction, has been the conservation chair of Grand Valley Audubon Society for more than two decades and a board member for nearly three. He also leads the society’s Western Screech-Owl observation project.

He has also made more than 30 trips to the tropics and wrote a book, *Ten Jungle Days* (Outskirts Press), that

combines human and natural history, personal memoir and nature discovery travel in the Costa Rican rainforest. His encounters there include exotic amphibians, anteaters, climbing rats, spider monkeys and “the delightful siren call of extraordinary birds.”

Korte grew up in the farmlands of rural southern Illinois, where “the only way to express outdoor interest then was hunting and fishing.” But the family’s 1956 edition of the *World Book Encyclopedia* revealed Nic’s true interest. “The ‘B’ volume,” he says, “had several very worn pages — the pages on birds. I wore them out looking at them.”

He became a geochemist, but after graduate school, he worked at the University of Arizona in Tucson, “where I actually encountered birders” for the first time — and found a life’s hobby.

In 2015, Korte received Bird Conservancy of the Rockies’ **Richard G. Levad** Award for “distinguished service to the ornithological community.” In 2019, National Audubon awarded him its **William Dutcher** Award for “leadership in the birding community of Western Colorado.” Follow his blog at [Birds and More – Birding and Conservation in Western Colorado](#).



WINTER PROGRAM PREVIEW

Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens

Nathan Pieplow
Monday, Feb. 24, 2025
7 p.m. MST via Zoom

[CLICK HERE TO REGISTER](#)

Colorado bird authority **Nathan Pieplow**, a frequent DFO speaker in past years, returns in 2025 to challenge and enlighten us on an unexpected topic for a man best known for his command of birdsong and bird sounds:

How do we tell Colorado’s two raven species, Chihuahuan and Common, apart from each other? And why might we be doing a lousy job of it with some of the photographs we post to eBird?

Pieplow’s presentation, “*Colorado: We Need to Talk About Ravens*” (**Monday, Feb. 24, 2025, 7 p.m. MST** via Zoom webinar), springs from reading a [recent article](#) by **David Sibley**, the renowned national birding artist and expert, in *North American Birds*, the journal of the American Birding Association. Pieplow says Sibley proposed that at least half, and maybe up to 90%, of photos submitted to eBird from Colorado as Chihuahuan Ravens might actually be Common Ravens. “If this is true,” Pieplow adds, “then the conventional wisdom on raven status, distribution, and identification needs some serious revision.”

Pieplow will review what we know about ravens and how we know it, including Sibley’s recent innovations in identification criteria and an in-depth listen to raven voices. Along the way, he’ll talk about raven intelligence and what that means for their vocal communication. And he’ll pose this question: “If we’ve been getting the ravens so wrong, what other accepted species records might need revisiting?”

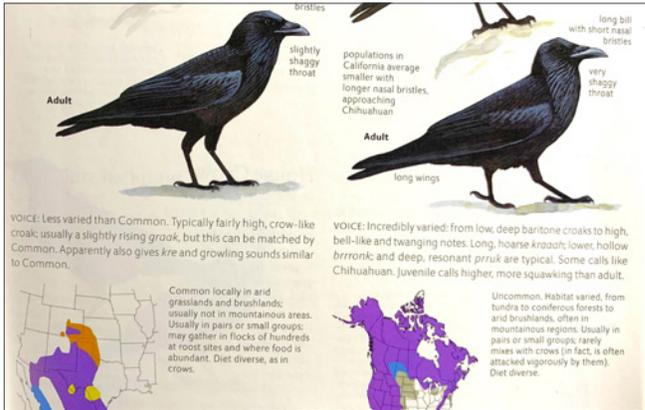
He will also discuss how birding authorities validate unusual sightings in Colorado, including reports of Chihuahuan Ravens

beyond the southeastern quarter of our state that is the northernmost part of the species’ range.

A decade ago, Pieplow wrote about the role of voice in telling Chihuahuan and Common ravens apart in Colorado on [Earbirding](#), a bird-sounds blog he co-authored through the 2010s. Pieplow’s most recent DFO appearance was in August 2022, when he entertained us with “The Best Bird Songs You’ve Never Heard.”

Pieplow wrote the *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds* (with separate volumes for western and eastern North America), and he is former editor of Colorado Field Ornithologists’ quarterly journal, *Colorado Birds*. He is also an author of the [Colorado Birding Trail website](#).

A native of South Dakota, Pieplow grew up fascinated by birds. Now based in Boulder, he is an assistant professor of writing and rhetoric at the University of Colorado Boulder.



Chihuahuan Raven, left, and Common Raven, side by side in *The Sibley Guide to Birds*

MONTHLY PROGRAMS

If you missed it: DFO's November program

DFO keeps a video archive of our monthly fall, winter and spring programs. If you could not attend our most recent program live via Zoom, click the “WATCH ONLINE” link below to view the recording on [DFO's YouTube channel](#).



Thanks to DFO historian **Kris Haglund** for editing and posting videos of other past programs, which can be viewed on the DFO website's [Past Programs](#) page.



Jessie Reese during Zoom presentation

NOVEMBER 23

The American Dipper, a Magical Mountain Friend Jessie Reese

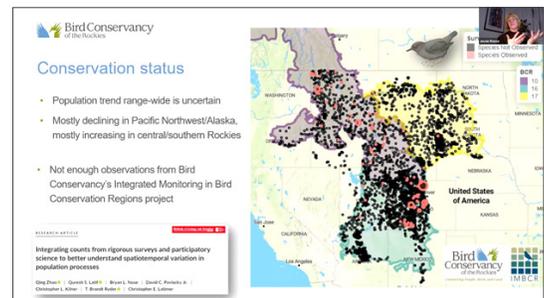
Bird Conservancy of the Rockies

Bird Conservancy of the Rockies research scientist **Jessie Reese** pursues a wide range of scientific projects in her professional work. But she makes clear in this Zoom presentation that her “magical mountain friend” is a personal subject of deep interest and fascination. After describing birdlike career migrations that brought her to Colorado in 2019, Reese shows a video of her first encounter early in 2020 with an American Dipper just half a block from her Fort Collins home. She was “super excited” to see a dipper this fall in that same spot for the sixth year in a row.

Throughout the talk, she harks back to that Spring Creek Trail location to illustrate dipper fidelity to favored streams, but also to note that some dippers fly from one drainage to another, an unexpected behavior she’s witnessed herself. She also sprinkles her overview of the species with dipper trivia and “myth-busters.” How come you rarely see dippers in August? They’re hiding from predators because they molt so many feathers at once that they can’t fly. That “dipper” name? It’s not for the bird’s frequent dipping underwater, but for its constant body-bobbing *out* of the water. And that bright-white eye flash when it blinks? It’s not the “second eyelid” nictitating membrane, but rather the dipper’s main eyelid, composed of tiny white feathers.

We’re fortunate to live in one of the species’ most concentrated and active ranges — and to have bird lovers like Reese to enlighten us about the American Dipper’s interesting and endearing presence.

WATCH ONLINE



Screen grabs from Zoom webinar on dippers

The early years: Colorado's oldest birding organization hatches, fledges, and soars

*Editor's note: This month, Denver Field Ornithologists celebrates 90 years as a birding club. To mark this milestone, DFO is researching and drafting **DFO @ 90**, a fresh history of our club in four parts.*

Beginning here with Part 1, chronological chapters will appear in succession through 2025 in four issues of The Lark Bunting, refitted from DFO's previous monthly newsletter into a new quarterly journal. Parts 2, 3 and 4 will appear in the journal's April, July and October issues.

A bird club in Colorado has been the dream or ideal of bird lovers for a long time. Tonight we are celebrating the first anniversary of such a club. To you, Mrs. Wosnuk, belongs the credit. It has taken initiative, courage, determination, and a great deal of time and effort. We appreciate what you have done. The members of the CBC join with me in saying, Thank You, Mrs. Wosnuk, for making our dreams come true.

— **Lillian Wagnild**, Jan. 16, 1936

Sharon Tinianow

Those words of tribute — delivered at a gathering of Denver birdwatchers in the midst of the Great Depression — acknowledged the energy and expertise that bird enthusiast **Helena K. Wosnuk** devoted to starting a nature group dedicated to enjoying and appreciating Colorado's wild birds. One year earlier, Wosnuk, a 39-year-old public health nurse, and fellow birdwatcher **Margaret Pritchett** invited other bird lovers to an organizational meeting to form a bird club.

On Sunday, Jan. 27, 1935, 22 people gathered at the Colorado Museum of Natural History (now the Denver Museum of Nature & Science) in Denver City Park. Guiding the group's formation was **Dr. Robert J. Niedrach**, the museum's curator of ornithology.

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Images top to bottom:

Early Colorado Bird Club logo depicting Lark Bunting
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Bird club co-founder Margaret Pritchett, in WWI-era portrait, played violin for Denver Symphony
J.A. Shirley IV via findagrave.com

Early depiction of Lark Bunting, the state bird, on a Colorado Bird Club scrapbook
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

HELP! Send DFO memories, photos for new club history

Help us write and illustrate the history of our club's first 90 years!

NEEDED for any years in which YOU have been a member are ANECDOTES, STORIES and PHOTOS from your time in DFO. Field trips, monthly meetings, picnics and more: We want any and all of your MEMORIES

MISSING from DFO's archives are the club's meeting minutes from **1986 through 2012**. If you have or know of copies of any records from this 27-year gap, PLEASE get in touch at the emails below

YOUR help will make **DFO @ 90** as complete and accurate as possible. YOU are the history of our club, from nearly a century ago to now. Email DFO president **Sharon Tinianow** (sharontinianow@gmail.com) and *Lark Bunting* editor **Patrick O'Driscoll** (patodrisk@gmail.com) about what you REMEMBER and what materials you HAVE of your time in DFO. Every memory and snapshot is welcome. Thank you!

DFO @ 90 cont from page 14

Helena and Margaret's spark to start the club had been struck in Niedrach's University of Denver "City College Extension" class in ornithology for adults. Wanting to continue their study of birds, they issued a bulletin for others of like minds to join them. Both were new to ornithology and to organizing. Pritchett, 42, was a violinist in the Denver Symphony Orchestra and lived with her parents and sister. Wosnuk, married to a disabled veteran of World War I, **John Wosnuk**, was taking a class at DU in administrative work. She welcomed the experience she would gain from organizing a club.

At that first meeting Jan. 27, the assembled bird enthusiasts discussed the many activities they could engage in together as a club. To organize, they elected officers to serve one-year terms. Helena agreed to be president, Margaret took on the role of secretary, and **Robina Storrie** became vice president and treasurer.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

They also discussed what to call themselves. All three of the club names first proposed had "Robert J. Niedrach" in the title, prompting Niedrach to thank the group but to suggest instead that a more general name would be better.

At the time, the only bird-related organization in the state was the Colorado Audubon Society, formed in 1913. The new group eventually settled on The Colorado Bird Club. Its members had no inkling that their modest venture would grow through the 20th century and well into the next, changing names in 1964 to Denver Field Ornithologists. That first get-together 90 years ago was the birth of today's DFO.

Club dues were set at \$1 per year (the equivalent of \$23 today). Meetings would be the third Thursday of the month at 8 p.m. in the museum's Children's Room, which was free for the bird club's use. In March, the club filed State of Colorado papers of incorporation to make the CBC official. By then, the club had 48 charter members.

Bear in mind that just one month later, President **Franklin D. Roosevelt** signed into law the Works Progress Administration, which would employ millions of jobless Americans. Amidst widespread economic stress and social upheaval, our Denver birding ancestors banded together to form a club. Their invention fed their passion for birds, got them outdoors and helped to push back their troubles and cope.

To frame CBC bylaws and conduct club business, the membership added a board of directors to their leadership. Besides the three officers, the first board included **Donald Harrison, Lillian Hunt, Edith Wiberg, and Clara Tate**. DFO's present-day mission statement still mirrors the words of the two-fold statement of purpose they wrote:

- *Promoting interest in the study and preservation of birds and their habitats*
- *Supporting local and national movements for birds' protection*

Continued on page 16

From that first year forward, the Colorado Bird Club met monthly except in June, July and August, when members planned summer birdwatching field excursions. The meetings began with social time and refreshments, and business was kept to a minimum to devote more time to learning about birds and their habitats. Programs at those early gatherings featured local speakers.

William S. Green, Jr., who taught biology at East High School across Denver City Park from the museum, spoke about Colorado mammals. **Irene Scott Taylor** gave a talk titled, "Birds we found in Texas and Old Mexico." At one meeting, someone read aloud an article from *Bird Lore* magazine titled, "Preservation of Bird Life." At another meeting, Niedrach addressed "The Technique of a Museum Preparator," demonstrating how his team preserved birds for research collections.

MEETINGS, PROJECTS . . . AND FIELD TRIPS

Attendees at these early meetings also shared bird observations, discussed a schedule of summer field trips, and noted new books about birds. In April of 1935, they observed the 150th anniversary of the birth of **John James Audubon** and discussed a variety of potential projects. At that same meeting, board member Clara Tate passed around a study skin, obtained from a birding friend in Mississippi, of a non-native species that was rapidly expanding its range in the U.S. — the European Starling.

That first summer would mark the start of the club's primary endeavor: Field trips. The excursions usually ran on both days of the weekend. The first of these was a bird outing and picnic on June 16, 1935 at Elk Creek Ranch, half a mile west of historic Shaffer's Crossing near present-day Staunton State Park.

Forty-nine people in 13 cars traveled 25 miles up from Denver as ranch guests of the **R.T. and Luci Davis** family. Club members **Catherine Hurlbutt** (later a well-known Denver bird rehabilitator and activist known to all as "Birdie" Hurlbutt) and **Clara Tate** directed morning and afternoon hikes that day. Using an outline Niedrach created, the trip participants kept a full bird list. The club minutes later noted, "A number of high altitude birds were observed in their nesting activities and heard in song" — from three Spotted Sandpiper nests with eggs and young to a Williamson's Sapsucker nest in an aspen, and calls of Hermit Thrush and Warbling Vireo. The first checklist included robins, jays, magpies, grouse, wrens, swallows and hummingbirds, "swooping up into the ether, then darting vertically down, settling on a willow branch with quivering wings."

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Images top to bottom:

Bird club members with "wounded" Great Blue Heron, foreground left, on a 1935 outing
Ruth Wheeler via DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Lunchtime on July 11, 1948 club outing to Summit Lake near Mount Evans
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

Bird club members Margaret Pritchett and Margaret Smith on May 1938 field trip to Devil's Head in Douglas County
DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science

That July, a dozen club members ventured up to Estes Park on the club's first overnight trip, staying at the YMCA of the Rockies. Local trips in August and September 1935 included a visit to a state fish hatchery on Brighton Road. As DFO historian **Warren I. Finch** would note later in his 2003 account of the club's early years, "half-day field trips were held from April to November on Saturday, starting at noon because most people worked Saturday morning (44-hour week), but trips were taken all day on Sunday." Another Finch draft of the history included a list of 20 different club outings in 1939. They ranged from the South Platte River, Denver City Park, Echo Lake and Genesee Mountain Park to destinations both obscure and well-known, including several long before they became state parks (Barr Lake, Castlewood Dam, Roxborough Park).

The CBC took up conservation issues right from the start, too. Those who attended the May 1935 meeting voted to urge passage of two bills before Congress to designate federal land as wildlife habitat under the 1934 Taylor Grazing Act. A resulting letter to Interior Secretary **Harold L. Ickes** read:

"The Colorado Bird Club, Inc. takes this opportunity of expressing its deep interest in the Government to set aside suitable territory on the public domain as refuges for wildlife in connection with the setting up of grazing districts to be established in the near future and in expressing the hope that this may be done."

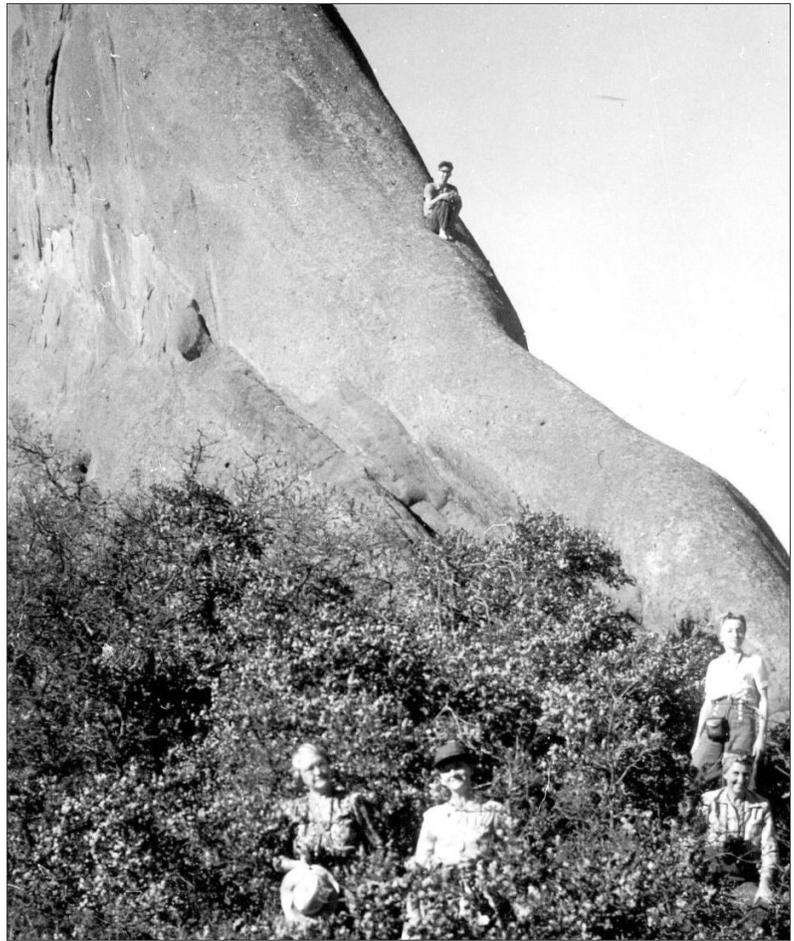
At the same meeting, members read and discussed the Migratory Bird Act No. 3933, a treaty with Mexico that followed the landmark bird protection pact signed with Canada in 1916.

ROUNDING OUT YEAR ONE

Meanwhile, club president Wosnuk worked with the Garden Club of Denver to oppose the use of live Mourning Doves as targets for bird hunters in Denver, as there was an open season on shooting doves. When the Colorado State Conservation Council was formed, the Colorado Bird Club was invited to send delegates.

By November of its first year, the CBC had formed two new committees for programs and parks. The first one organized the monthly meetings and printed postcard reminders to mail months in advance. The second committee investigated locations for a bird sanctuary in Denver. Bird feeding stations were set up in urban parks, and eventually (1940), Denver Mayor **Benjamin F. Stapleton** approached the club about that bird sanctuary idea.

Each time the club met, members got a report on the most recent field trip and an announcement about the next ones coming up. Meeting notices were even published in the Denver newspapers and posted in libraries. By the CBC's first anniversary in 1936,



Club member Jim Humphrey halfway up a Roxborough Park hogback in October 1948 with his wife and three other birders below (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

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membership had ticked up to 57 members. **Charles H. Hanington**, president of the Colorado Museum of Natural History, welcomed and invited the club to continue using the museum for its meetings.

At the same time, the CBC began to publish pamphlet-sized annuals that highlighted field trip activities and programs, and contained the names and addresses of every member of the club that year. These yearbooks, club meeting minutes and scrapbooks kept by a couple of mindful members served for decades as the club's only historical record.

GETTING “INK” AND ATTENTION

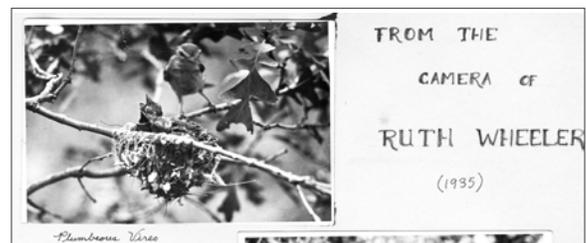
In August 1937, an article in *The Denver Post* described the CBC as “unique and interesting among the numerous clubs in the city . . . unusual in its aims” for the members’ devotion to birds. Unlike typical meeting-oriented clubs of the day, this one led outdoor trips “en masse to some isolated spot near Denver to study birds,” *The Post* wrote. “They are taught the proper procedure in searching for the birds, in detecting their habits and in finding their nests. So enthralled have these men and women become with nature study that their meetings and trips are a vital part of their lives.”

Later that year marked Colorado’s first involvement in the National Audubon Society’s Christmas Bird Count, a national effort begun in 1900. That 1937 count took place in Jefferson County and involved only four birders. It was led by club adviser Niedrach and his colleague **Alfred M. Bailey**, later co-authors of the seminal two-volume, 895-page *Birds of Colorado* (1965), the bible of the state’s birdlife. In the early 1950s, the Colorado Bird Club took over Audubon’s “Denver” Christmas count, a 73-year tradition that current count compiler **Joey Kellner**, a longtime DFO member and field trip leader, carries on today.

Over the years, the bird club inevitably made changes to its structure. More officers were added and the number of directors rose to nine. New committees ventured into additional areas of club operations, from grant-making to communications and outreach. Early on, the CBC even created a portable library on wheels of bird books and magazines.

Field trips, core club activities from the start, steadily increased in number, destinations and scope year after year — and they still do today. Besides more than 200 trips annually, DFO now has new wrinkles like “Birds Plus” outings that combine birding with related pursuits, from wildflowers, reptiles and history to photography, geology and nature journaling.

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Images top to bottom:

Juvenile pair of Long-billed Curlews found and photographed on a 1930s bird club outing (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

First-year club outing in unidentified Colorado woods (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Boys handle bird specimens in museum class by bird club founding adviser Robert Niedrach (Municipal Facts via, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

Photo of vireos in nest from 1935 scrapbook page of Ruth Wheeler, charter club member (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

COPY of
Document OF INCORPORATION
for
The Colorado Bird Club from
STATE OF COLORADO

Office of the Secretary of State.
United States of America,) ss. CERTIFICATE
State of Colorado)

I, James H. Carr, Secretary of State
of the State of Colorado, do hereby certify that-----
-----HELENA K. WOSNUK LILLIAN HUNT-----
-----CLARA C. TATE ROBINA C. STORRIE-----
-----EDITH M. WIBERG MARGARET E. PRITCHETT---
-----DONALD HARRISON-----

Citizens of the United States, and residents of the
State of Colorado, being desirous of forming a corpora-
tion (not for pecuniary profit,) under and by virtue
of the provisions of Chapter Nineteen (19) of the
General Statutes of the State of Colorado, entitled
"An Act to Provide for the Formation of Corporations"
Approved March 14, 1877, have made, signed, acknow-
ledged, and this-twentieth---day-of---MARCH---A.D.1935
at the hour of--11:30-o'clock, A.M. filed in my office
the Certificate of Incorporation of THE COLORADO BIRD
CLUB.

IN TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have hereunto set our hands

CHARTER MEMBERS
THE COLORADO BIRD CLUB
1935

Robert J. Niedrach	Elizabeth Henry Brown
Lillian Hunt	Luda Bungler
Virginia Christensen	Donald Harrison
Emil W. Christensen	Ida M. Anderson
Clara C. Tate	Emelia H. Anderson
M. Eugenia Walker (Now Mrs Kaupp)	Jessie Force
Gertrude R. Seyler	Cora B. Page
Lillian Wangnild	Elizabeth Swan
Ada Swan	Emma C. Dexheimer
Laura Looms	Edna McLaughlin
Edith Sewell Douglas	Wm S. Green, Jr.
Edith M. Wiberg	Sue Frances Dougan
Madeline F. Buck	Laura H. Ziegler
Ruth Wheeler	Anna M. Longan
Cornelia Ortgysen	Katherine Marx
Mary E. Kirsher (Now Mrs. Crow)	Alberta O. Kirkpatrick
Mabel B. Ellis	Marguerite M. Sutton
John F. Wosnuk	Kathrine Harrison
Edith Voris	Otto Friedrichs
Bertha Feldwisch	Virgil E. Knowlton
Mary K. Edmiston	Betty Jane Hughart
Ada E. Gay	Julia M. White
Leila Simpson	Alicia P. Roberts
Belle W. Dickinson	Anna B. Huck
Berness Bungler	

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Top: Copy of Colorado Bird Club's original incorporation document in 1935 (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)
Bottom: Original typewritten roster of the club's charter members in 1935 (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

GOODBYE DEPRESSION, HELLO WAR

By 1938, membership had almost tripled, to 155 individuals, as the nation toiled to exit the Great Depression. Within three years, America's sudden entry into World War II after Pearl Harbor ended the depression but upturned everything else. As some bird club members left home to join the fight, CBC voted to protect the memberships of all active-duty personnel, putting them in "inactive" status for the duration. Wartime gas rationing curtailed regular field trips, and trip leaders were urged to plan outings that could be reached easily by streetcar or bus.

But the club carried on with the programs about birds — and on occasion, about other critters. In 1943, **Joseph A. Bixby**, Denver's city forester, spoke about a homefront menace: the city's ubiquitous Fox Squirrel. In a program titled, "The Truth About the Squirrels of Denver," Bixby believed the cute rodents were to blame for a 15-year lack of nesting hummingbirds in town. Squirrels were notorious for raiding backyard "victory gardens," a vital source of wartime food for families. They nested in attics and scavenged patio furniture for nest materials, too. Bixby advocated population reduction by live-trapping (shooting was against the law) for release in the foothills to forage for themselves.

In December 1944, the club again appeared in the local news. *Rocky Mountain News* writer-photographer **Harriet Rhoads**, a.k.a. "The Rambling Camera Girl," would pose a question to a group of people, then share their responses in print with photos of those quoted. This time, Harriet asked folks at a Colorado Bird Club meeting, "What kind of bird do you think is most helpful to man?"

George W. Roberts, then club president, replied, "Nearly all birds are helpful, and man cannot live without them." **Charles Ford Hansen**, recording secretary, said, "There are so many useful birds — those that destroy insects and others that prey on rodents." **Edith Voris**, vice president, added, "The more you learn about them the more you want

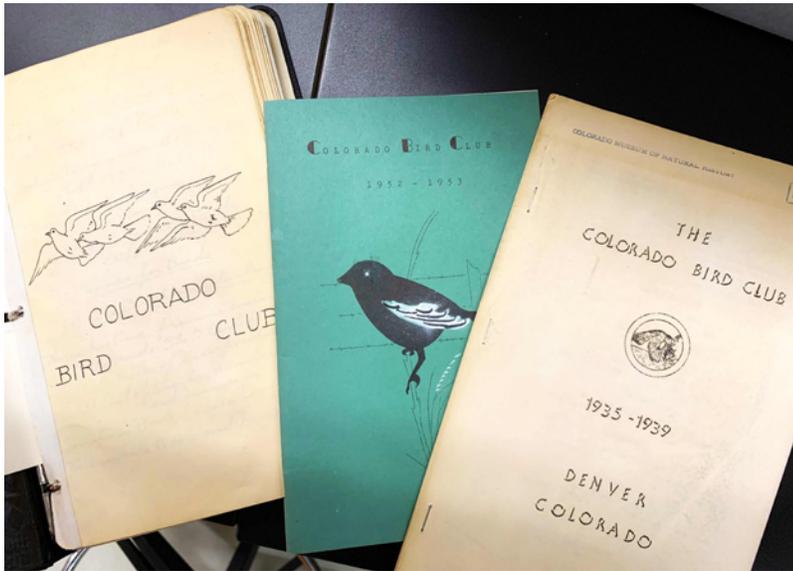


MEMBERS IN THE ARMED SERVICE

- Boyd, Alvin L.
- Cooper, Kenneth
- Fishburn, Bob
- Fitzgerald, Bob
- Green, William S.
- Kleinschnitz, Fred
- Landau, Dexter S.
- Posel, Sidney L.
- Rauch, Elizabeth
- Rockwell, F. L.
- Smith, Margaret
- Tillquist, Leonard
- Wilk, Joseph A.

Images top to bottom:
Ferruginous Hawk on cover of club's 1945 yearbook (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)
Burrowing Owl on cover of club's 1946 yearbook (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)
1940s club yearbook page of club members in military during World War II (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

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Pamphlet-sized annuals from the club's early years (DFO Archives, Denver Museum of Nature & Science)

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to know.” Member **Ruth Wheeler** noted, “I couldn’t say just one, for too many are useful. Even hawks and owls are helpful, for they clear up rodents. Only a few hawks are destructive.” **Ralph L. Asbury** replied, “My favorite bird is the owl — it has so much character.”

Remarkably, through the war years, nothing in the minutes of the club’s monthly meetings ever referred to the war. Having pulled out of a depression and faced the global catastrophe of a second world war within a generation, the Colorado Bird Club kept going and serving its purpose, providing a needed distraction from the battlefronts of Europe and the Pacific.

A DECADE DONE, AND MORE TO COME

The club’s 10th anniversary arrived early in 1945, the climactic year of the global wartime ordeal. With the conflict’s approaching end, bird club leaders contemplated the future of their still-young organization. They discussed ways to increase membership, presumably lower after years of homefront hunkering down and absent servicemen and women. Suggestions included lowering dues for those under age 18, and engaging Boy Scout and Girl Scout troops. But the club, reluctant to stray into politics from its founding focus on birds, did deny a request for time by the League of Women Voters to speak at one of the monthly meetings.

Great relief must have been palpable at the regular meeting on Sept. 25, 1945 — just three weeks and two days after Japan’s surrender formally ended the war. In retrospect, six words that CBC secretary Hansen wrote in the official minutes of that night’s first post-war gathering were a promising sign of things ahead: “A gratifyingly large attendance was noted.”

The club for the study of birds — formed in the depths of the Great Depression and still together through the trials of World War II — was on solid footing and focused ahead on its second decade. New members assumed leadership roles. Co-founder Margaret Pritchett resigned from the CBC board after leading a number of projects through the early years. Co-founder **Helena Huron** (formerly Wosnuk, a last name she and her husband changed because it was too hard to pronounce) died in 1951 and was buried in Denver’s Fairmount Cemetery, where DFO field trips today still lead birders among the tombstones.

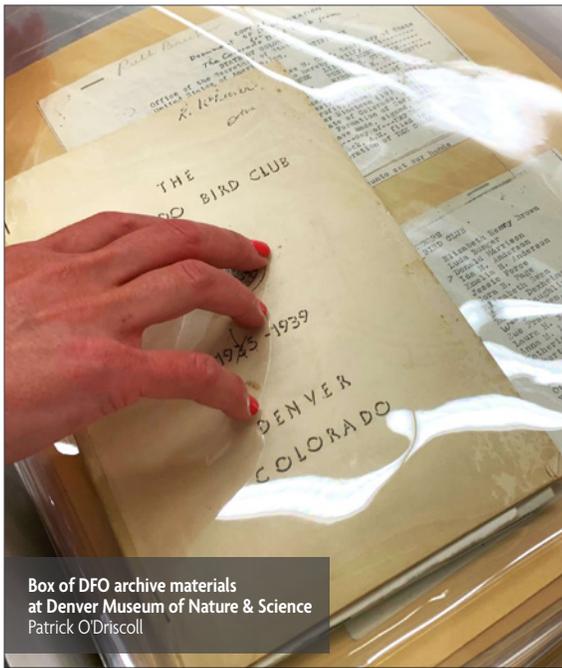
Ahead on the early 1950s horizon were a dues increase to \$2 a year . . . a new spring bird count . . . Boy Scouts at a club meeting, working on bird merit badges . . . the first *Colorado Bird Notes*, a new bulletin of club goings-on . . . mimeographed bird checklists for CBC members’ use in the field.

One member who joined in 1953 had walked past the bird club’s museum meeting place daily as a Park Hill schoolboy. Between January 1947 and May 1950, he checklisted birds on his commute through City Park to East High: wigeons, shovelers and Mallards on the way to class, and chickadees, creepers and juncos on the way home.

Much later in life, that long-ago teen — having since served as DFO president, led innumerable field trips, edited Colorado’s *Breeding Bird Atlas* and organized decades of seasonal bird counts — is now our club’s longest-serving member: **Hugh Kingery**, present-day dean of Colorado birders.

Hugh’s 72 years in the Colorado Bird Club and DFO span the rest of our club’s history, which we’ll continue to retell here when we return in April with Part 2 of *DFO @ 90*. Until then, good winter birding!

About *DFO @ 90*



Box of DFO archive materials at Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Patrick O'Driscoll



Going through DFO archives at Denver Museum of Nature & Science
Patrick O'Driscoll

To mark the 90th birthday of Denver Field Ornithologists in 2025, DFO is producing *DFO @ 90*, a four-part historical narrative of the club's nine decades so far. The project team includes club president **Sharon Tinianow**, club newsletter/journal editor **Patrick O'Driscoll**, and club historian **Kris Haglund**, with assistance from other members and outside supporters.

Source information for our research includes DFO records, meeting minutes, photos, yearbooks and other materials in the club archives at the Denver Museum of Nature & Science. The original Colorado Bird Club (renamed DFO in 1964) held its meetings there for the first 29 years of the club's existence, when DMNS was the Colorado Museum of Natural History. As DFO, the club continued to meet in the museum through 2018.

DFO thanks the DMNS Archives Department, led by **Laura Uglean Jackson**, for its generous time, expert curation of DFO's records and invaluable assistance in this historical research.

The DFO archive also contains invaluable scrapbooks, photos and memorabilia that were kept through the years by history-minded charter members of the club, including co-founder **Margaret Pritchett** and **Ruth Wheeler**. Ruth was later the first recipient of the [Ptarmigan Award](#), which DFO created in 1988 to honor her as the last living charter member from 1935. The team also relied on a previous DFO history written in 2002-03 by club historian, former president and Ptarmigan awardee **Warren I. Finch** (1924-2014).

Further research in the Denver Public Library's Special Collections and Archives included club-related material, popular press accounts, microfilm collections and the scrapbook archive of original member **Catherine A. "Birdie" Hurlbutt**. DFO thanks the Central Library's archives staff for friendly and plentiful assistance to the project team.

Tinianow is chief writer of *DFO @ 90*, with O'Driscoll editing, revising and augmenting with additional research gathered by the team. Thanks also go to club members who responded to the project's request for their own DFO-related memories and accounts with materials and sitting for interviews.

The *DFO @ 90* team appeals again to members for accounts and memories. Please help us compile as complete and accurate a living history of our club as possible. To contribute your words, photos, ideas and recollections, please contact Tinianow at sharontinianow@gmail.com and O'Driscoll at patodrisk@gmail.com.

FIELD TRIPS

Still time to vie for spot on DFO's southeast AZ "Sky Islands" threeppeat!

Patrick O'Driscoll

The first two times in 2023 and 2024 were already the charm, but this year's excursion to southeastern Arizona's bird-rich "Sky Islands" region will be a charmer, too. BIRDING ALERT: The **Wednesday, Jan. 15 deadline** to register for a chance to join this May 15-26, 2025 trip is approaching fast.

Veteran DFO trip leader **Joey Kellner's** previous two expeditions to the Southwest's best birding locale were smash hits. Many participants had life-bird bonanzas during the 12-day driving expedition. Kellner says the trip "is designed especially for those that have never been to this area of the country."

The group will visit many popular birding hotspots, including the Chiricahua, Santa Rita, Huachuca and Catalina mountains. Habitats range from desert grasslands and Sonoran Desert thorn scrub and cacti to riparian corridors and the pine-studded "sky islands" of the mountains. "This is not specifically a 'target species' trip, but a general southeast Arizona trip that will immerse the participants in wonderful habitats." At least 6-8 species of hummingbirds are likely, including specialties like Violet-crowned, Lucifer and White-eared. So is Elegant Trogon, a hoped-for "lifer" among first-timers.

The all-inclusive cost is \$2,600 per person, which includes rental vehicles, lodging, gas and food, leader's expenses and land/access fees. Unspent funds at the end of the trip will be refunded to participants; Kellner notes he is "not profiting financially from this trip." Accommodations are double-occupancy (participants paired by gender) in a combination of commercial hotels and "in-habitat" lodging. "Think about waking up to birds and birds sounds you've never seen or heard before!" Kellner notes. Meals are a combination of "on-the-go" breakfasts and lunches (sandwich shops, grocers, fast-food) and sit-down restaurant dinners most nights to relax, recap that day's discoveries and discuss the next day's plans.

But there's only room on the trip for eight birders total (two full rental vehicle loads), so selection is by a modified combination of previous waitlisters and random drawing. Kellner explains: "Due to the popularity of this destination . . . anyone who signed up for this trip in 2023 and 2024 and did not make the cut (three individuals) and desires to go in 2025 will automatically be selected." The rest should "put your name in the hat by registering **prior to Jan. 16** for this field trip."

Registration is already open on the DFO Field Trips page. On Jan. 16, seven participants besides Kellner will be chosen by random pick from registrants who meet gender requirements for room sharing. Their \$800 deposits are due by Feb. 1 to reserve their spots. The remaining balances are due April 15. Participants who cancel after April 15 forfeit their deposits. Registrants planning to share a room with a spouse or friend should both register and, when registering, add the other person's name in parentheses in the "emergency contact" box on the DFO trip registration form online.

Other questions? Contact Kellner at vireol@comcast.net. A detailed itinerary with locations and potential species will be sent to all who sign up on the DFO trip registration webpage.



Mexican Spotted Owl on DFO SE Arizona expedition in 2023
Rob Raker

REGISTER FOR SKY ISLANDS FIELD TRIP



FROM THE FIELD WITH DAVID SUDDJIAN

A brief end-of-year-end review of yet another trip-packed DFO year

David Suddjian

Quiz time: Which all-volunteer organization hosted 250 free public field trips in 2024, with 52 individual leaders and nearly 500 different participants? (Hint: Its initials are D, F, and O.)

Thanks to so many volunteers, members and friends, Denver Field Ornithologists had another remarkable year doing what we do first, last, and best: Field trips.

Participants on DFO outings in 2024 recorded 378 bird species (315 in Colorado) on nearly 1,300 eBird checklists. DFO birded in 50 of Colorado's 64 counties. And 2024 was the year our club completed DFO's eBird map for the state, coloring in the last four of those counties where we had never led birding excursions before.

For all that activity, it was surprising that we added only one new species all year to DFO's own life list — and it's not even native to North America. It was a single Chukar (a Eurasian partridge introduced as a wild game bird in the western US during the mid-20th century) on a field trip near Cameo in Mesa County. But hundreds of trip participants marked lifers of their own on our trips, some of them by the dozens.

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Pursuing poorwills on June 8, 2024 field trip in Ken Caryl Valley
Scott Hammel

DFO's "Birds Plus+" initiative was a significant new feature for 2024. This ongoing series of individual field trips pairs our usual birding activity with related field focuses. These bird outings were enhanced by immersion into aspects of botany, history, geology, nature journaling (in word and art), photography and more. Participants expressed excitement at opportunities to enjoy new disciplines in the field.

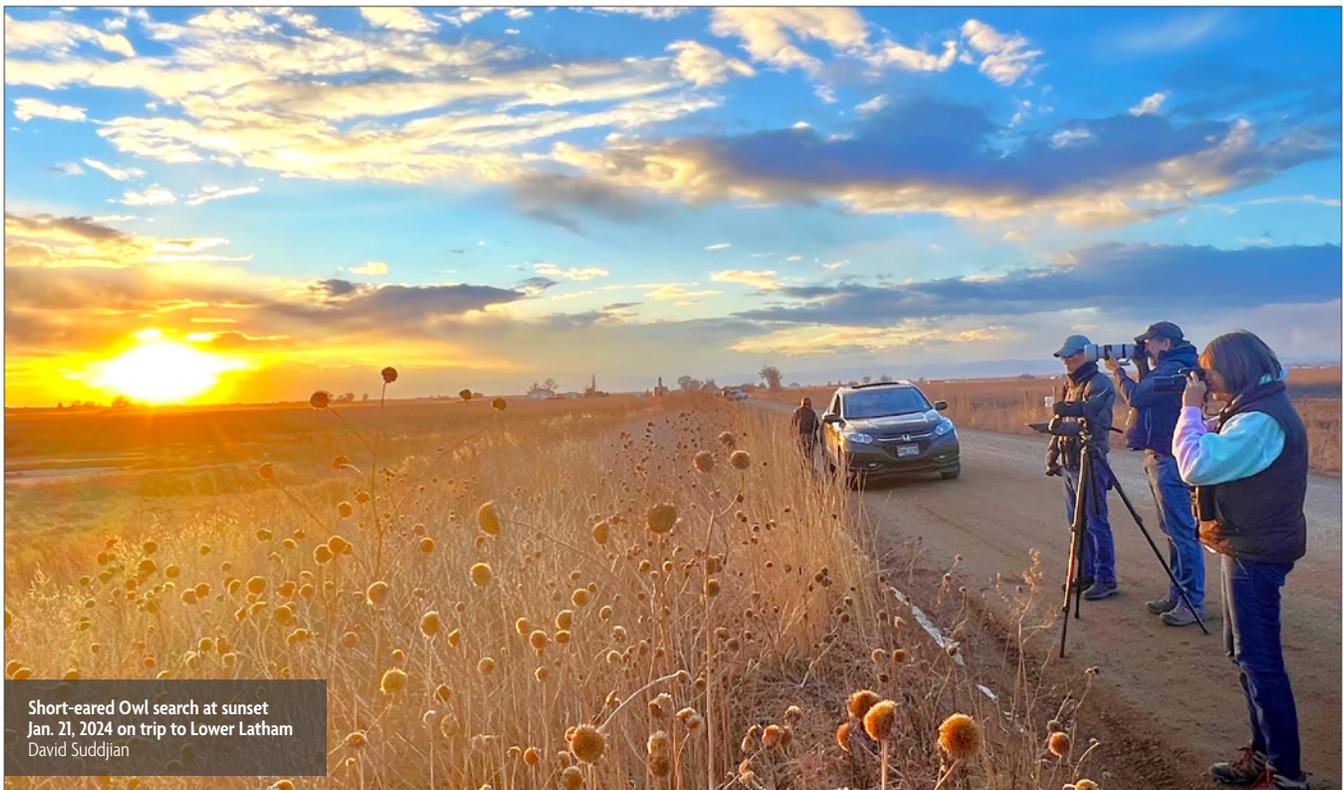
Forty-two DFO certified leaders led trips in 2024, joined by 10 more guest leaders on some of the Birds Plus+ trips. I imagine this was the biggest team of leaders ever for DFO, and we welcomed five new trip leaders to the fold. Ten DFO leaders led six or more field trips in 2024: **Ajit and Liza Antony, Jason Bidgood, Nate Bond, Charlie Chase, Carly Crow, Ben Jacques, David Suddjian, Gary Witt and Gigi Zarzuela.** Special thanks goes to Joey Kellner for leading another *12-day trip* to the "Sky Islands" of southeast Arizona (which he'll do again for a third time this spring).

It was a pleasure to gather trip leaders together for a midsummer appreciation picnic and walk in Genesee Park on July 27. And with similar great appreciation, we acknowledge trip leader **Diane Roberts**, who announced her retirement near year's end as a trip leader.

Diane first led a DFO trip in 2018 and led or co-led 65 field outings since then. These included many trips to far-ranging destinations in Colorado, as well as overnight outings to New Mexico and Wyoming. Diane's sense of adventure, knowledge of birding places, and great ability to spot birds made her field trips entertaining and enlightening for all.

Happy new birding year to all, and here's to many 2025 field tripping experiences as filled with discovery and satisfaction as those in 2024 were.

David Suddjian, DFO Field Trip chair since 2021, has led more than 550 club outings. He joined DFO after moving to Colorado in 2013 from his native California. He organized DFO's 2018 "Big Year" and created the "BIRD BOMBS" series of bird ID webinars. He received one of DFO's first Peregrine Awards for innovation in 2023





THE LIVES OF BIRDS

Canada Geese: A love-hate relationship with humankind for now — and ever?

“One swallow does not make a summer, but one skein of geese, cleaving the murk of a March thaw, is the spring . . . (A) migrating goose, staking two hundred miles of black night on the chance of finding a hole in the lake, has no easy chance for retreat. His arrival carries the conviction of a prophet who has burned his bridges. A March morning is only as drab as he who walks in it without a glance skyward, ear cocked for geese.”

— Aldo Leopold, *A Sand County Almanac*

Jared Del Rosso

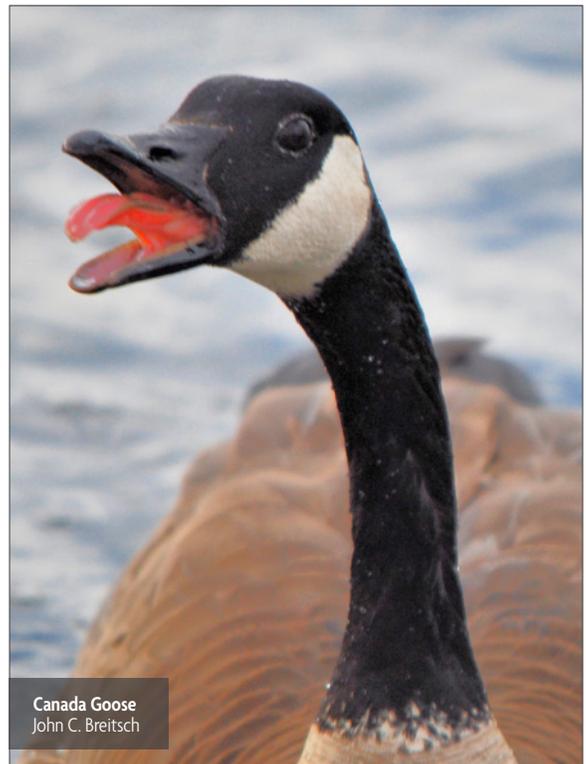
How far we’ve come since the great conservationist Leopold lionized the Canada Goose (*Branta canadensis*). Now ubiquitous on the American landscape, Canada Geese are ultra common and, to many birders, unremarkable. For our non-birding neighbors, the birds’ goslings may be adorable urban companions. But the parents of those goslings? Hissing threats that chase after runners, dogwalkers, curious toddlers and, yes, even birders.

Not to mention their reputation as urban blights. Green goose droppings cover and smear park walkways, fill our puppies’ mouths (ugh!), and track home with us on the bottom of our shoes. No wonder some deride them as “lawn cars” — or, as the director of parks and recreation in Greenwich, CT memorably described them in 1992 to *The New York Times*: “Flying rats.”

But you already know this, because over the past few decades, America’s continental conflict with urban and suburban geese reached Colorado and the Front Range. It simmers today in the suburbs, where communities contract with “pest management” companies to chase our mixed flocks of white-cheeked geese — Canada and Cackling Geese — out of one green space, golf course or subdivision and into another. In the cities, the frontlines are often our great parks, where vast lawns, lakes and ponds sustain year-round populations (an estimated 5,000 birds) plus tens of thousands more in migrant flocks that overwinter here and return to Canada in spring to hatch and fledge more geese.

Colorado’s own “[Goosinator](#),” a brightly colored, remote-controlled monstrosity dreamt up and marketed by two Lakewood brothers-in-law, chases away metro Denver geese with scary painted fangs and the menacing buzz of its propeller. Groundskeepers use more

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Canada Goose
John C. Breitsch



Canada and Cackling Geese in
Ferril Lake, Denver City Park, 2018
Patrick O’Driscoll



Colorado-made Goosinator used to chase geese off park ponds, golf courses
Goosinator.com

lethal strategies, too. Denver Parks & Recreation oils eggs laid by resident geese to suffocate would-be goslings before they ever hatch. In 2019, the city even culled growing permanent flocks in several parks in a [controversial series of goose roundups](#).

Other cities and suburbs across the US wage similar battles. But like most instances of “nuisance” wildlife, the perceived challenge of residential geese is largely self-inflicted. In his book *Nature Wars: The Incredible Story of How Wildlife Comebacks turned Backyards into Battlegrounds*, **Jim Sterba** describes how human practices of hunting, conservation, and suburban development established resident populations of Canada Geese throughout much of our country.

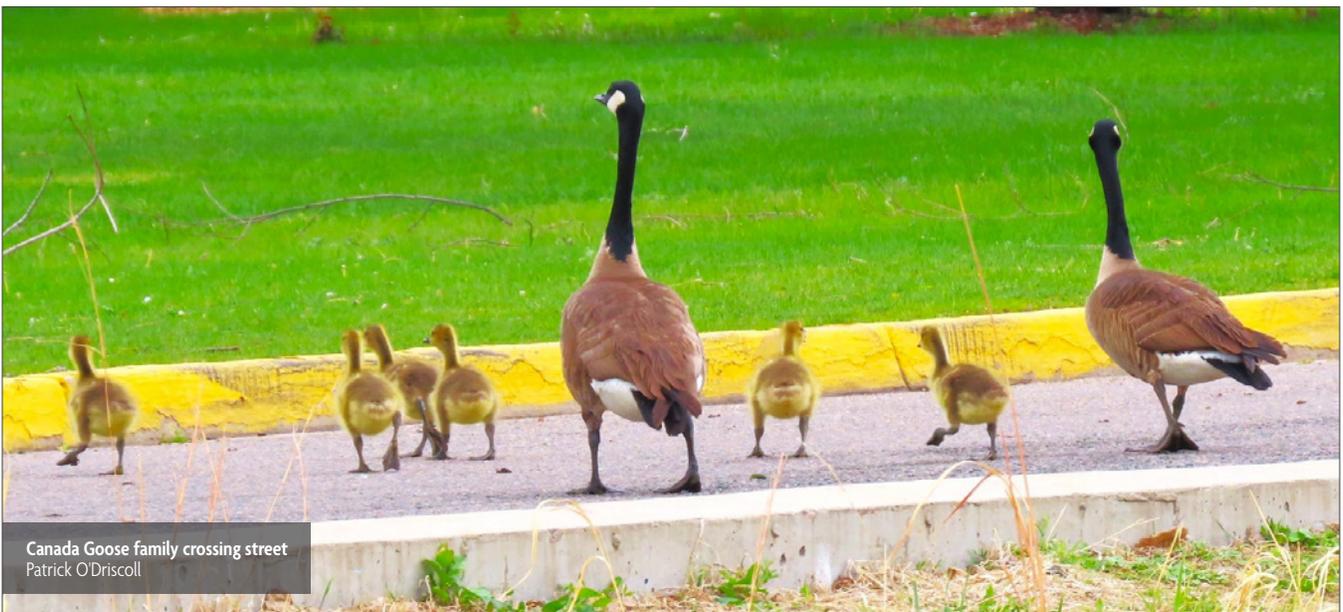
The story centers on a single and mostly non-migratory subspecies: *Branta canadensis maxima*, or the Giant Canada Goose. Sterba writes that goose hunters commonly used members of this subspecies as living decoys to attract migrating geese to ponds and lakes. After the federal government prohibited the use of live decoys in 1935, the subspecies lost its purpose to hunters. They sold some of them to communities that set them free on local ponds and lakes. State and wildlife departments bought others to establish local, non-migratory populations.

According to a [2014 *Journal of Wildlife Management* article](#) on Canada Geese in Colorado, our state had but one breeding population in the 1950s and only one winter concentration. Around the same time, the Colorado Department of Game and Fish (now Colorado Parks and Wildlife) began transplanting three subspecies here, including the Giant Canada. The transplantations continued into the 1960s east of the Continental Divide and the 1970s west of the divide.

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Canada Goose atop a van in a Centennial shopping center in 2023
Jared Del Rosso



Canada Goose family crossing street
Patrick O'Driscoll

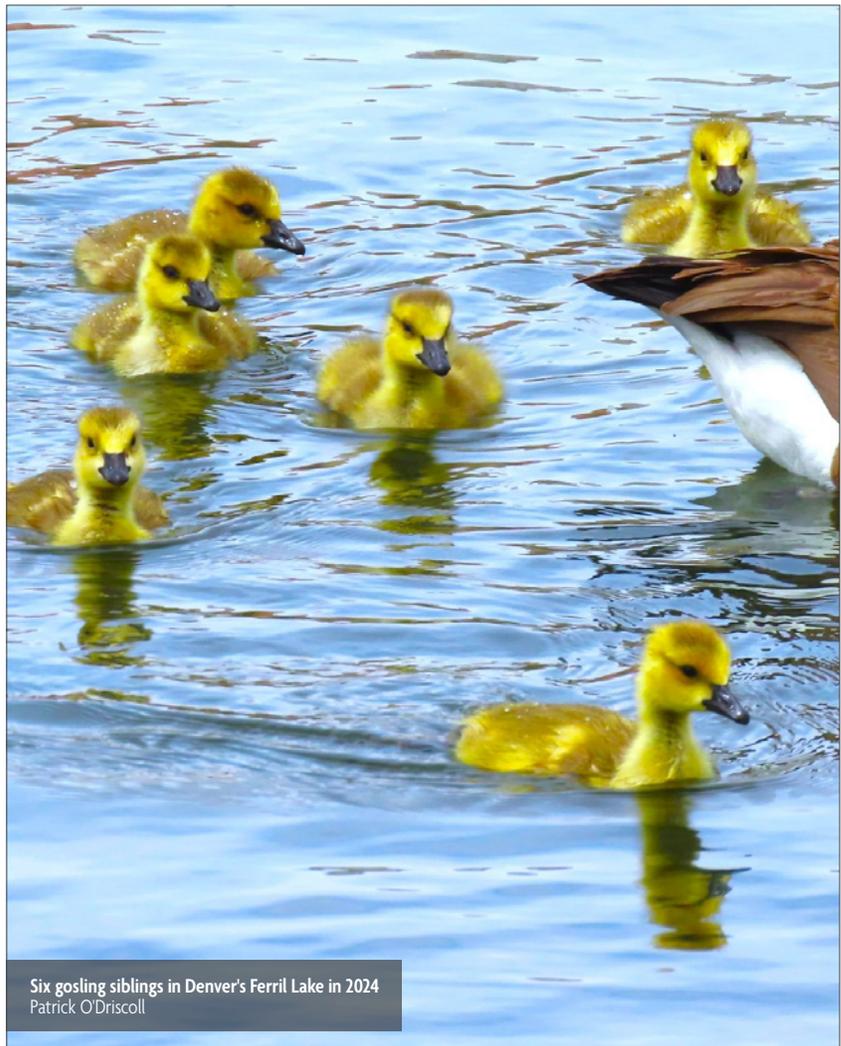
At the same time, urban and suburban planners here and across the US created parks, golf courses, campuses, cemeteries, shopping centers, and other spaces that would serve geese as much as they serve people.

Geese, it turns out, have the same kinds of preferences and insecurities as most of us do. Like urban and suburban humans, they love green expanses of lawn and also get flighty around predators. Since the mid- to late 20th century, we have “managed” wild threats from coyotes, mountain lions and bears — as well as domestic risks from neighborhood strangers and unleashed dogs. But our manicured turfsapes, so pleasing to human eyes, are also a tasty, three-season bluegrass buffet to goose palates. We and the birds both also love water, so the puddling of our communities with ponds and streams attracts the geese, too. Since neither geese nor humans like hunting in the neighborhood, that activity moved out, and we and the geese settled in side by side.

In other words: We invited geese to join us. We gave them a dream habitat as we built our own dream neighborhoods. No wonder the non-migratory flocks have stuck around for good. Meanwhile, their out-of-town relations are far more numerous, conspicuous and among us in the winter.

In fact, the number of migratory Canada and Cackling Geese totaled during Audubon’s Denver Urban Christmas Bird Count (a Jan. 1 tallying of birds in a 15-mile circle over central Denver and a part of Aurora) has increased dramatically over the past 30 years. In the 1990s, the Denver Urban count logged roughly 115,000 white-cheeked geese, an average of about 11,500 annually. The 2010s saw the total spike to nearly 240,000, more than doubling the average annual count to about 24,000. Although the

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Six gosling siblings in Denver's Ferril Lake in 2024
Patrick O'Driscoll



Canada Goose and gosling in nest 18 feet up
an old cottonwood in Denver City Park in 2018
Patrick O'Driscoll

numbers are slightly down in the 2020s, the first five counts this decade averaged about 22,100 Canadas and Cacklings a year, just below those for the 2010s.

The increase is even more spectacular in Madison, WI, where Aldo Leopold himself taught courses on wildlife. Madison's counts in the 1980s tallied fewer than 250 white-cheeked geese a year. In the 1990s, the count ballooned to nearly 3,000 annually. It continues to grow: Since 2020, Madison has averaged more than 13,000 geese each year, the vast majority of them Canadas.

Were he here today, Leopold would be disoriented by the lack of seasonality among 21st-century geese. One skein of geese no longer means much. Sometimes, all it means is that someone's off-leash dog in a local park chased a flock into the air.

Perhaps we can no longer rely on the arrival and departure of geese for messages about the seasons. But their presence still contains truths. Whether we mean to or not, for good reasons or bad, human intervention in the lives of wild species has changed them. It has also changed us, and our experience of nature.

How many people today still spend March with an ear cocked for geese, as did Leopold? Or watch the birds with the wonder expressed in **Mary Oliver's** much-loved poem "[Wild Geese](#)"? Oliver's wonder and Leopold's awe at Canada Geese may seem strange today when the birds are such common residents and visitors. Maybe the geese are just background noise — semi-tame creatures waddling and foraging on suburban lawns and asphalt, popping up in goofy locations like treetops or the roofs of cars and buildings.

Our resident geese may yet have other messages for us. The enormous *Branta canadensis maxima*, our urbanized Giant Canada Geese, might inspire interest in birds among city folk, especially young ones. Canada Geese are not family, but they are familiar. They live among us, in our most conspicuous places — grassy medians, empty ballfields, the edges of city ponds. No need for us to skulk around in the undergrowth to observe them, either, as we do with smaller, more skittish urban birds. No need to be a birder, carry binoculars, or use the Merlin app to ID them.

Until writing this, I hadn't considered that a Canada Goose might be my spark bird. As a birder, I'm drawn to the insectivores — especially nightjars and flycatchers. It's no surprise that my "discovery" of the [Eastern Phoebe](#) in my native Northeast hooked me on birding. Although it was ever-present in my previous 30 years there, I hadn't realized the species existed!

Writing this essay, I now wonder about the Canada Goose that briefly lived with my family in the Hudson Valley of New York. I was 8 or 9 years old, in the summer of 1989 or '90. Two decades before I became a birder, this goose looked back from the cemetery next door, took brief flight and joined me in our backyard.

"Our" goose hung around awhile — days, maybe weeks. Seeming half-tame, half-wild, it bathed in a small plastic pool we kept for it. Eventually it would depart, of course. But the memory of it did not. Nor did the spark of curiosity it brought to me about the lives of birds.



Childhood photo of the author (2nd from left) and family with Canada Goose (preening) in their backyard playpool

The Lives of Birds will be a recurring feature of *The Lark Bunting* quarterly. DFO member and birder **Jared Del Rosso** is also a wildflower gardener and sociologist with a special interest in urban and suburban nature. He's writing a book about Whip-poor-wills in American culture. Read more at his blog [The Lonesome Whip-poor-will](#).



November-December DFO trips *In Focus*

Fall migration and early winter DFO field trips in November and December 2024 included 41 total outings. Of those, participants on 21 trips took pictures of “birders birding” as photographic history for our 90-year-old club. If you’re on DFO trips in January, February and March, please take a few shots of your fellow birders and send us the best for the next issue of *The Lark Bunting*, which beginning in 2025 will publish quarterly. Send .JPG or .PNG photo files of birders in the field, with date/location of trip and any individual IDs (if needed), to editor **Patrick O’Driscoll** at patodrisk@gmail.com. Deadline for our April 2025 spring-quarter issue is **Friday, March 28**. Thanks!

NOVEMBER 3
Littleton
(Arapahoe County)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Virginia Gulakowski, Jonathan Hebel, Angela Hebel,
Nicole Callaway, Gigi Zarzuela, Kenneth Stuckey,
Sue Summers

Field trippers on an unnamed pond on the South Platte River during Nov. 3 outing to several Littleton locations (David Suddjian)



NOVEMBER 3
**Fairmount Cemetery/
Highline Canal**
(Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Marjorie Middleton, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle,
Jacqueline Gorman, Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine,
Linda Klumpers

Birders in the snow on Nov. 10 field trip to Denver’s Fairmount Cemetery and High Line Canal (Jason B. Bidgood)



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NOVEMBER 11
Waterton Canyon
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Bonnie Prado, John Batt, Patricia Kuzma Sell, Amy Manning,
Nick Podsiadlik, Joel Jones, Anne Craig, Oliver Urdiales, Kris Saucke

Veterans' Day birders focus on cooperative Canyon Wren
during Waterton Canyon field trip Nov. 11
(David Suddjian)



NOVEMBER 14
**Prospect Park /
Wheat Ridge Greenbelt**
(Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Nave Prentice, Sandy Mathias, Kris Tita,
Gigi Zarzuela, Nadiyah Watts, Kris Sauck

Field trippers pause for Virginia Rails below
Bass Lake boardwalk on Nov. 14 outing to
Prospect Park and Wheat Ridge Greenbelt
(Nadiyah Watts)

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NOVEMBER 15
**Park County Reservoirs
(Park)**

Leaders

Joe Tuttle and David Suddjian

Participants

Jennifer and Robert Tonge, Debra Strike, Andrea Duran, Courtney Rella, Kelly Ducham, Coreen Spellman Bailey, David Strike, Linda Cunico

Bundled against 6-degree temperatures, Nov. 15 field trippers scan thousands of distant waterfowl on glassy Spinney Mountain Reservoir
(David Suddjian)

NOVEMBER 17

**Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR
(Adams)**

Leader

Jason Bidgood

Participants

Virginia Gulakowski, Timothy Condon, Michelle Trotter, Jeanne Marie Dillon, Kris Tita, Morgan Kahle, Nicole Callaway, Julia Auckland, Linda Klumpers, Sue Summers

Field trippers at Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR view waterfowl from floating bridge across east neck of Lake Ladora
(Jason B. Bidgood)



NOVEMBER 23

Bluff Lake Nature Center

Leader

George Ho

Participants

Nadiyah Watts, Scott Levine, Brandy Margeson, Shai Ronen, Virginia Gulakowski, Rae Jones, Nicole Callaway, Linda Purcell, Kathleen Bahr

Participants on the Nov. 23 DFO trip to Bluff Lake Nature Center in Denver pose together on lake's boardwalk
(George Ho)



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NOVEMBER 29
Pueblo area
 (Pueblo)

Leader
 David Suddjian

Participants
 Ryan Corda, Chip Dawes, Linda Cunico,
 Ryan Dibala, Jeff Dawson, Robin Trevillian

**Birders scoping Pueblo Reservoir on Nov. 29
 field trip to the Pueblo area**
 (Ryan Dibala)

DECEMBER 1
First Creek @ DEN
Open Space
 (Denver County)

Leader
 Patrick O'Driscoll

Participants
 Felice Lyons, Steve Methven, Sandra
 Hoyle, Michelle Trotter, John Batt,
 Sofia Prado-Irwin, Ryan Corda, Rosanne
 Juergens, Emily Scheler, Marjorie
 Middleton, Scott Hammel

**Participants on Dec. 1 DFO field trip to First Creek
 @ DEN Open Space focus on a pair of Great
 Horned Owls in trees along the creek**
 (Patrick O'Driscoll)



DECEMBER 5
Birds + Bird Photography,
“Raptor Alley” near Nunn, CO
 (Weld)

Leaders
 David Suddjian and Dave Prentice

Participants
 Julia Gwinn, Cynthia Breidenbach, Ryan Corda, Linda
 Purcell, Diana Egan, Peggy Gonder, Stephen Sears

**Focusing in on birds of prey on Dec. 5 DFO field trip in Raptor
 Alley near the northeastern Plains town of Nunn in Weld County**
 (Dave Prentice)

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DECEMBER 8
Denver City Park
 (Denver)

Leaders
 Patrick O'Driscoll and Archer Silverman

Participants
 Cody Brown, Shai Ronen, Lynn Slaga, Susan Blansett,
 Jayne James, Debra Lentz, Steve Methven, Sandra Hoyle,
 Cheryl Ames, Linda Wyatt

Dec. 8 field trippers in Denver City Park put eyes and lenses on
 Dark-eyed Juncos on south shoreline of Duck Lake
 (Patrick O'Driscoll)

DECEMBER 8
Barr Lake State Park
 (Adams)

Leader
 Jason Bidgood

Participants
 Kris Saucke, Linda Klumpers, Michelle Verostko, Kris Tita,
 Brady Anderson

Birders on DFO field trip on Dec. 8 to Barr Lake SP scan the south
 shoreline
 (Jason B. Bidgood)



DECEMBER 8
**Birds + Nature Journaling, Audubon
 Kingery Nature Center & Trails**
 (Jefferson)

Leader
 Carly Crow

Participants
 Paula Rosson, Amy Manning, Andrew and Michelle Husko,
 Timothy Condon, Jennifer Tonge

Participants in Birds Plus + Nature Journaling field trip Dec. 8 to
 Audubon's Kingery Nature Center work indoors on their journal entries
 (Carly Crow)

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DECEMBER 15

Bear Creek Greenbelt (Jefferson)

Leaders

Gigi Zarzuela and David Suddjian

Participants

Patricia Kuzma Sell, Lark BenDaniel, Kris Tita, Ryan Corda, Virginia Gulakowski, Shai Ronen, Cassandra Stroud, John Featherstone

Separate DFO and Denver Audubon field trips ran into each other Dec. 15 at Bear Creek Greenbelt and birded on together
(John Featherstone)



DECEMBER 19

West Littleton (Jefferson, Douglas, Denver)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Catherine Millard, Linda Purcell, Phil Waltz

Field trippers sorted Cackling Geese for a Snow X Cackling hybrid at Hine Lake in Robert Easton Regional Park during Dec. 19 outing through southwest metro locations around Littleton
(Phil Waltz)

DECEMBER 22

Gull Therapy (multiple counties)

Leader

David Suddjian

Participants

Dana Hiatt, Anne Craig, Ryan Corda, Phil Waltz, Michelle Trotter, Jason Bidgood

Scanning Cherry Creek Reservoir near marina for 3 kinds of loons and 5 kinds of gulls on Dec. 22 field trip
(Phil Waltz)



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DECEMBER 22
Washington Park
(Denver)

Leader
Jason Bidgood

Participants
Beth Partin, Shai Ronen, Jeanne Marie
Dillon, Kris Tita, Eileen Warner, Debbie Fox

Birders on Dec. 22 field trip to Denver's
Washington Park look high to sort out a Brown
Creepers from a mixed flock
(Jason B. Bidgood)

DECEMBER 28
South Platte River,
Littleton to Denver
(Arapahoe, Denver)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Cate de la Garza Millard,
Marjorie Middleton, Lance and Sharon Tanaka,
Jenny Germano, Cassandra Stroud, Virginia Gulakowski

DFO birders on South Platte River trail in Denver
Dec. 28 during field trip with holiday "Platte Bowl"
duck-spotting competition (divers vs. dabblers)
(David Suddjian)



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DECEMBER 29

Northern Saw-whet Owling in Ken Caryl Valley Area (Jefferson)

Leader
David Suddjian

Participants
Cynthia Breidenbach, Julia Gwinn, Lynn Slaga, Coreen Spellman, Lance and Sharon Tanaka

Happy DFO owlers on very successful Jefferson County pre-dawn search Dec. 29 for Northern Saw-whet Owls (9 heard, 1 seen)
(David Suddjian)



DECEMBER 29

Boulder County Raptor Tour

Leaders
Donna Stump and David Suddjian

Participants
Ryan Corda, Paula Rosson, Dave Prentice, Linda Gathany, Phil Waltz, Kathy Cisar, Amy Manning

Field trippers focus on a Golden Eagle during Dec. 29 raptor ramble in Boulder County
(Dave Prentice)

DECEMBER 31

South Platte River @ 88th (Adams)

Leaders
David Suddjian and Archer Silverman

Participants
Catherine and Kevin Millard, Kris Tita, Cheryl Ames, Michelle Verostko, Becky Russell, Linda Purcell, Sarah Feigelson, Jayne James, Caroline Armstrong, Ryan Corda

Co-leader Archer Silverman, center, points out a bird on New Year's Eve field trip along South Platte River at 88th Avenue
(Linda Purcell)



LAST WORD, LAST LOOK

**First Creek fence birds:
A gallery from the camera
of John Breitsch**





Top: Merlin, December 2014, Bottom: Vermilion Flycatcher, May 2018
Previous page: Brewer's Sparrow, May 2016

Patrick O'Driscoll

"Good fences make good neighbors," **Robert Frost** wrote in his poem *Mending Wall*. As we birders know, they make good perches, too — for birds. Our avian friends aren't particular. Any urban chain-link boundary, suburban grape-stake barrier, rangeland barbed wire strand or weathered wooden post in a prairie pasture will do.

I think of this whenever I visit First Creek @ DEN Open Space, the scrubby strip of riparian cottonwoods, grassland, prairie dogs and walking paths wedged between the east boundary of Rocky Mountain Arsenal NWR and the Peña Boulevard access corridor to Denver's airport.

The first time I birded there, in 2016, I was with **John Breitsch**, the late DFO field trip leader and friend whose passion for that place in his northeast Denver backyard put three First Creek hotspots on Denver's birding map. As we walked up pot-holed Buckley Road between the Arsenal and the prairie dog town, John kept pausing to photograph every bird he saw along the Arsenal's chain-link barrier.

"Fence birds," John replied when I asked why. "I love fence birds."

The birds' use of man-made boundary markers suggests a basic symbiosis between them and us. They get convenient hunting perches, safety lookouts and resting spots above the grass, weeds and ground predators. We birders get a sturdy, studio-like prop and backdrop to frame our camera shots and admire the whole bird above any view-obscuring vegetation. Win-win.

Before John died of cancer last August at the age of 60, he bequeathed to Denver Field Ornithologists his [10,000-image cache of bird photos on Flickr](#). Since then, I've been poking through the photographic trove. I paused (for now) when my tally reached 102 shots of more than 75 species on fences of all kinds. John shot the majority of them along the Arsenal/Open Space fence lines.

In a New Year's salute, here's a gallery of First Creek-area fence birds from the camera of our departed friend. I hope you enjoy them as much as John did.

All photos by John C. Breitsch, pictured at right.



(Beth Payne)



Top: House Wren, August 2017, Bottom: Wilson's Warbler, September 2016



Top: Bullock's Oriole, June 2017, Bottom: Western Kingbird, August 2017



Top: Loggerhead Shrike, October 2017, Bottom: Lark Sparrow with food, June 2018



Top: Dark-eyed Junco, January 2017, Bottom: American Robin, March 2017



Top left: Say's Phoebe August 2018, Top right: Eastern Bluebird, November 2017, Bottom: Harris's Sparrow, March 2018



Top: Lincoln's Sparrow, May 2018, Bottom: Green-tailed Towhee, September 2018

Until the next Lark Bunting . . .
HAPPY WINTER BIRDING!

